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SUBJECT: NEPAL: UPDATE ON MAOIST ACTIVITIES, NOV 22-29

REF: (A) KATHMANDU 2169

(B) KATHMANDU 2258

(C) KATHMANDU 2259

1. Summary: A year after Maoist insurgents unilaterally broke a four-month truce with the government, this week saw further reports of civilian deaths and widespread destruction of public facilities. As two United Nations agencies criticized the insurgency for exacerbating the already precarious situation of the country's poor and disadvantaged, children and schools continued to come under Maoist threat, forcing some students to flee their homes to avoid forced recruitment. Two interest groups publicly opposed the upcoming "indefinite strike" against educational institutions called by the insurgents. Opinion polls showed clear support for US military assistance and no faith in offers for peace talks by the Maoists. Conflict in the Everest region has raised concerns that celebrations commemorating the first successful ascent will have to be canceled. End summary.

NAT'L HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION URGES END TO VIOLENCE;
CONFIRMS SEVEN CIVILIANS KILLED AT JUMLA

2. In a November 28 press statement released after a visit to western Jumla district, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) called on the Maoists to stop killing unarmed civilians and destroying essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and banks. The fact-finding mission, sent to investigate a November 14 battle between Maoists and government forces (ref A), stated that four civilians and three prisoners were among those killed.

3. NHRC has also appealed to the government to address the immediate needs of the local citizens and to provide compensation to the families of civilian victims in Jumla and in other incidents around the country. In addition to visiting the site of last week's battle, the team traveled to southwestern Bardiya district to investigate the November 25 death of two students and a civilian woman who were killed along with two police officers when a group of 12-15 Maoists opened fire on a market.

4. In a break with murderous precedent, sixteen of 18 policemen kidnapped by the Maoists in their attack have been released. (Note: Military and police prisoners were also released following the September 7 attack in Arghankanchi. End note.)

JUMLA DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT 250,000 USD

5. The November 14 attack in Jumla did 20 million Nrs (250,000 USD) worth of damage, according to local estimates. Twenty-eight buildings, including the airport tower, bank, post office and education office, were destroyed, together with the private homes of three local families. According to local reports, Maoists ransacked the private houses after they had taken control of the District Police office, walking away with "whatever they could lay their hands on." The local branch of Rastriya Banijya Bank claims that it lost 1.9 million Nrs (24,300 USD) in cash, and 1.6 million Nrs (20,400 USD) in gold. A government assessment of the damage is currently underway.

MAOISTS DISRUPT POWER SUPPLY TO REMOTE DISTRICTS;
HYDRO PROJECT DELAYED BY ONE YEAR

6. Electricity supply to the entire midwestern and farwestern regions has been affected by Maoist destruction of a 132-kilovolt tower in southern Dang district. Following destruction of the tower, Dang and four other districts have had to tap into electricity from an adjacent power grid. As a result, all fourteen districts of the

midwestern and farwestern regions have had to resort to load-shedding to meet the demand.

17. Meanwhile, the director of the 70-megawatt Middle-Marsyangdi hydropower project announced that the insurgency has delayed construction by least one year. The conflict has made it impossible for construction to continue on a 24-hour basis, and tightened security has prevented the project from transporting explosives to the construction site. Middle-Marsyangdi is the third largest hydropower project in the country. A German development agency has supplied 85 percent of the 175 million USD project.

UNFPA BLAMES INSURGENCY FOR PLIGHT OF WOMEN

18. At a conference to address the effects of political disruption on the women of South Asia, United Nations Family Planning Agency (UNFPA) representative Bina Pradhan expressed concern about the use of women in the Maoist insurgency, and said that the conflict has placed Nepali women in a desperate situation. Citing threats against civilians, Pradhan said that women and children have been among the hardest hit. "At the same time that political disturbance has forced many of them to flee homes," she said, "those who stayed back are reeling in abject poverty." Pradhan stated that women affected by the insurgency were in danger of being trafficked as a result of social upheaval and bleak economic conditions.

CONFLICT ENDANGERS FOOD SUPPLY FOR MARGINAL ECONOMIC GROUPS

19. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has released a study identifying seven livelihood groups as vulnerable to food shortages in the country, and stating that the Maoist insurgency is contributing to an already precarious situation. The report recommended immediate action to assist subsistence farmers with land of less than 0.5 hectares, rural service providers, agricultural laborers, porters and urban squatters, the groups most affected by food shortage. Subsistence farmers make up 30 percent of Nepal's population and 80 percent of those named as most vulnerable.

110. The FAO report cited unproductive land, small-sized holdings and lack of irrigation as among the chief causes of the food shortage, and charged that the country's armed conflict is aggravating the problem. The report says that the insurgency has cut off farming in "several areas," and that many forests that served as food and fuel sources for the Maoists--and for subsistence groups--have been made off-limits by the government. (Note: Post reported food supply issues in ref B. End note.)

111. In southwestern Bardiya district, farmers report that Maoists have warned them against harvesting their rice or any other food grains. The farmers expect that the insurgents will steal the entire anticipated harvest of 40 metric tons of grain. In northwestern Bajura, locals report that Maoists are demanding food from the villagers at gunpoint, and imposing taxes on subsistence farmers with no cash. When the farmers can't pay, the insurgents take a portion of their harvest.

STUDENTS LEAVE VILLAGES TO AVOID MAOIST DRAFT

112. In southern Sarlahi district, students are leaving their villages and settling in town centers due to fear of being used as human shields by the Maoists. According to local reports, Maoists have been pressuring village families to provide 500 Nrs (7 USD) per month or send their children to join the insurgency. (Note: Most farming families in the Terai region earn less than 10 USD per month. End note.) Students in Sarlahi are afraid to attend school for fear of being kidnapped, says a local teacher.

113. Similar tales have come from areas throughout the country, including far-eastern Ilam and southwestern Surkhet districts. In Ilam, 150 youths are reported to have fled their homes to avoid extortion and forced recruitment, with another 65 reported in Surkhet. A local from one of the villages in Surkhet claims that Maoists have already forced 70 lower caste or poor children to join the insurgency.

114. The threats against students have come in the middle of wheat-sowing season, depriving their struggling families of much-needed extra labor.

INTEREST GROUPS PROTEST SCHOOL CLOSINGS

115. At least two organizations have publicly criticized the call by Maoists for an "indefinite strike" against educational institutions. Following a meeting with the

Minister of Education and Sports, members of the Private and Boarding Schools' Organization told reporters that they hope to be able to convince Maoists that schools have already been "set free" and that no further steps need to be taken. The All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) has declared a plan to rally students from 500 schools and colleges to protest the strikes.

STUDENT INJURED BY ATTACK ON SCHOOL;
MAOISTS BOMB TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

16. Officials from a Kathmandu school expressed relief that only one student was injured when a Maoist bomb exploded on the ground floor of a building packed with students and teachers attending afternoon classes on November 28. The bomb, planted by a group of ten young men who forced their way onto the campus grounds, exploded in the library, destroying four computers and a photocopying machine, and blowing out part of the brick wall. The second and third floors of the building were also damaged. One student, who was picking up his school certificates on the ground floor when the bomb exploded, suffered minor injuries.

17. On November 29, an early-morning bomb exploded near the administrative offices of Tribhuvan University on the outskirts of Kathmandu. The blast damaged the building, but no injuries were reported. Tribhuvan is Nepal's oldest and most prestigious university.

OPINION POLLS SHOW NO FAITH IN PRACHANDA,
APPROVAL FOR US MILITARY AID

18. Two Internet opinion polls, recently published by the weekly Nepali Times, show overwhelming support for US military aid to Nepal and a clear lack of faith in Maoist leader Prachanda's sincerity. Respondents were 64.9 percent in favor of US military aid. When asked whether Maoist leader Prachanda is serious in his latest offer for peace talks, 67.7 percent of respondents voted no, with only 26.6 percent saying yes.

CONFLICT THREATENS EVEREST JUBILEE

19. In yet another blow to tourism, trekking outfitters are concerned that planned celebrations commemorating Sir Edmund Hillary's historic first ascent of Mt. Everest in 1953 will be disrupted by the ongoing conflict. According to newspaper reports, trekkers have heard Maoists in the Everest region boast that they will attack Lukla airport once the tourist season ends later this month, and Post has heard increasing reports of Maoist activity in the area (ref B). British trekking outfitter Himalayan Kingdoms was reported to be monitoring the situation daily, and prepared to refund clients' money if the security situation worsens. The 50-year anniversary celebrations are scheduled to begin early in 2003. Tourism in Nepal is reported to have slumped by more than 70 percent since the insurgency began.

MAOISTS CONTINUE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS
AND GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

20. Maoists in northeastern Taplejung district killed two civilians on November 22, taking the young men to the playground of a local secondary school before shooting them in the back of the head. On November 23, also in Taplejung, Maoists called 28-year-old Laxmi Poudel from his house and beheaded him in his front yard. In the same village on the same night, Maoists shot and killed a second young man after abducting him from a wedding ceremony. Meanwhile, in Kathmandu, Maoists detonated a pressure cooker bomb in the home of an ex-policeman. No injuries were reported.

21. On November 26, Maoists burned down the Brahmapuri Village Development Committee in southern Sarlahi district, destroying all village records. On the evening of November 27, a bomb blast destroyed the land revenue office in Taulihawa, the capital of southern Kapilbastu district. Total loss from the incident is estimated at 500,000 Nrs (6370 USD).

MALINOWSKI